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IV.—PROBLEMS OF GENERAL SEMITIC GRAMMAR.

A number of causes have combined to retard the study of the general grammar of the Semitic languages. Chief among these has been the real paucity of materials. The various dialects, especially those known up to thirty years ago, seemed so much alike in inflections and vocabulary as to offer little hope of fruitful comparison; it was felt that the phenomena approached too near to identity to allow a penetration behind the present stage of linguistic development into a markedly different one. And it has happened, besides, that during the present century Semitic scholars have been much occupied with working up new dialects, especially the Babylonian-Assyrian and the Sabeian. In general, as the workers in this department have for various reasons been relatively few, while the field is large, the greater part of the available force has been expended on more or less special investigations. To this it must be added that scientific methods have been comparatively slow in making their way into Semitic grammatical studies. Old Jewish grammatical traditions still linger in our text-books; the grammars of Arabic, Hebrew and the related languages have hardly yet reached the conception of an independent treatment of the phenomena with which they deal; their terminology and mode of treatment are largely derived from medieval Arabic writers who were disciples of the early Greek schools, and from the current Indo-European grammars. For these reasons there has been no attempt at a full comparative treatment of the grammatical facts of the Semitic family. Renan announced his intention to prepare a comparative grammar, but never carried it out. Ewald, Olshausen, Bickell, Philippi and others have made occasional and valuable contributions to the subject, but there has been no general connected presentation of the facts. It is a gain, however, that the necessity for such work is recognized, and that much preliminary work has been done and is being done. It is to be hoped that these preparatory investigations will rapidly increase in number, and the material gotten ready for the future historian of Semitic grammar. Meantime it may be of use to state briefly some of the morphological questions that require solution.

In the first place, passing over palaeographical questions (of which, however, there are many that need working up), we find in the phonology not a few points that have not received satisfactory examination. Unfortunately, all early Semitic writing, with the exception of the Assyrian, is without vowels, and as there are no very early transcriptions into languages provided with vowel-signs, a good deal of uncertainty rests on the pronunciation of all these languages down to a short time before the beginning of our era. The one example of an ancient vowel-system, the Assyrian, has the disadvantage of being taken from a foreign, non-Semitic language, and probably fails to give the nicer differences of the vowel-pronunciation. The elaborate schemes of the Ethiopic and Hebrew were made at a time when the pronunciation of these languages had already undergone considerable changes, and when, in the case of the latter, a somewhat artificial system of the schools had taken the place of the original. There are no transcriptions into Indo-European languages earlier than the proper names that are found in the Septuagint, and these are mostly made by translators who did not speak Hebrew as their vernacular. Such transliterations in ancient times are often, indeed, of little value; it was not usual to take more trouble than might be necessary, to give the most convenient representation in one's native tongue of a foreign word. Even now, as is well known, transcriptions from one language into another are not often reliable. Still some help may be got from a careful comparison of such renderings as exist of Semitic words in foreign alphabets. What Renan undertook to do for Greek by an examination of Syriac translations of Greek words might profitably be attempted for Latin, Greek and other transliterations of Semitic words. In the absence of early vowel-signs we have to resort to the later systems (devised some centuries after the beginning of our era) and to general grammatical principles. No attempt has yet been made to determine the original vowel-sounds, to trace them through the changes they have undergone in the various dialects, and to define their etymological functions. In the decision of such questions some use may be made of the modern Semitic languages, especially Arabic; but the present pronunciation has to be treated with great care, since it is obvious that it is different from that of a thousand years ago, and it may be inferred that it is still more different from that of four thousand years ago. As to whether the vowels had symbolic significance, it does not appear that there are sufficient data for deciding such a question; but if ever any con-

clusion in respect to it is reached, it must be after their powers and uses have been settled.

The consonants offer several interesting points of inquiry. The sounds of some of them are not yet clearly determined. The group of sibilants, for example, is difficult; what is the relation of the *Sin* to the *Samek*, and what is the reason of its absence from the Syriac? Ethiopic has a curious *p*-sound, and Sabeian an equally curious *t*-sound, and modern Arabic presents some noteworthy fluctuations of usage, as in the sonant palatal, which is our *g* in Egypt, and our *j* elsewhere (and in some regions French *j*). There are traces also of the origination and dropping of sounds; sometimes it is a question whether one language has differentiated the original sound, or another has dropped one of two consonants, substituting for it one nearly related, as in the *Cheth* and *Ayin*, which have two forms each in Arabic, and only one in Hebrew. The early transliteration of Hebrew *Çade* by *st* raises a question as to its pronunciation. The interchanges of letters between different languages and within the same language require more careful statement than has hitherto been made of them. Of the former there are the interchanges between the dental and the sibilant, and between *Ayin* and *Çade* and others; of the latter, that between *m* and *w* in Assyrian, the change of *s* before *t* into *l* in the same dialect, and the Sabeian change of *m* to *b*. This is a point that is often very loosely handled. Some lexicographers allow themselves the greatest license in attempting to trace the connection between various stems of similar meanings. Perhaps Semitic etymology does not furnish materials for a Grimm's Law, but at least it should be settled which letters interchange and which do not.

Next, there is the standing problem of the triliteral roots, much discussed, but still unsolved. The difficulties connected with it are so great that some scholars are disposed to dismiss it as insoluble. But, though its treatment has often been unscientific and arbitrary in a way to bring discredit on the whole investigation, and though data for the determination of all the questions involved are not at hand, there is no reason to despair of progress. Something has been done towards clearing away misconceptions, and particularly in abandoning *a priori* assertions. Thus it has been said (and is still said) that polysyllabic original roots are inconceivable, or that it is impossible to conceive of anything else. But it is now generally believed that we know too little of primitive speech to say what was or was not possible; soberer feeling leads

us to refrain from pronouncing opinion on times whose conditions are not fully known to us, and to wait till examination of the facts shall carry us step by step to sure results. One thing may be considered as established, that the great mass of the Semitic primitive roots were trilateral; beyond this not much progress has been made. The essays of Friedrich Delitzsch and Philippi towards the decomposition of the trilaterals into bilaterals are admirable specimens of scientific work; but the results obtained by these and similar attempts are not wide and general and coherent enough to give assurance of their correctness. One thing that stands in the way of reliable and useful results is the fact that these attempts at the analysis of dissyllabic into monosyllabic roots are usually made for the purpose of comparing Semitic roots with Indo-European in order to prove the formal identity of the two families, and there is naturally undue haste in making the comparisons. The substitution of such an ulterior in the place of the purely scientific aim of discovering the facts beclouds the vision and vitiates the conclusions. For the present Semitic and Indo-European students must give up the attempt to show that the two families are identical in their word-material, and confine themselves to determining, as far as possible, the original forms and meanings of the roots. The immediate problem in the Semitic department is to look for traces of root determinatives, and as preliminary to this there should be a more careful lexicographical treatment of the various dialects. The decision of other, more general questions must depend in like manner on the accumulation and examination of the phenomena of primitive speech. It has been asked how the Semites came to adjust their radicals to this three-syllable measure. It is no answer to this question to say that they had a trisyllabic instinct, or a sense of euphonic fitness that required just this form; that is merely stating the phenomenon in different words. Nor does it help to point out the advantages of this system, to say, for example, that the consonant skeleton, filled out with vowels combined in a great variety of ways, gives symmetry to the language, or to define the inflectional and other functions of the two classes of letters, or to say that the developments of the consonant and vowel elements of words went hand in hand. All these things may be true, but they do not explain the trilateral form of the roots. On the other hand, if these be regarded as original and uncompounded, it has to be explained why this form remained in one family of languages and not in others. The question would then belong to the science of

language, and its decision would involve an examination of all the linguistic families in the world. Whether we proceed from this point of view or not, there are some groups of languages that the Semitic student must take into account, especially what has been called the Sub-Semitic, and the Egyptian, the grammatical treatment of which has not, however, been carried very far. These are most akin to the family with which we are dealing, and, though the time may not yet have come for a serious lexicographical comparison, it is probably to this point that we must look for light on the vexed question of the origin of the Semitic triliterality.

When we come to the formation and inflection of stems there is less mistiness, though here also there are many questions awaiting solution. In the first place, it is generally agreed that noun and verb, in their present form, both come from an original noun-verb, which, as a simple uninflected stem, performed the functions of both. This appears from the fact that the inflections of noun and verb are in the main identical, the chief difference being in the forms of the personal pronouns that are attached to them. There is no difficulty in supposing a time when only nouns, or nouns and pronouns were used in speech; in classic Hebrew there are sentences without verbs, the verbal idea being expressed by the abstract noun of action (Infinitive), nouns also acting as prepositions and adverbs. The succeeding history of the language may then be regarded as a process of differentiation of this previously existing material. The noun developed itself in one direction, and the verb in another. The precise form of the original triliteral noun-verb is doubtful, whether it had only one vowel or a full trivocalism.

Passing now to the history of the development of the noun, we have first the formation of derivatives by prefixes and suffixes; to the former belong *t*, *s*, *m*, *n*, *y*, and to the latter *m*, *n*, *y*, *w*. The same letters occur in the two classes; is there any difference in their force before and after the stem? This question can be answered only by fixing the meanings of the affixes, which it is not easy to do. The significations are most of them very general. To two of the prefixes it may be possible to attach definite values, namely, to *m*, which denotes the place, instrument, agent or act, or, in general, the place, and *y*, which expresses the agent or, more generally, the category. The first of these has, as suffix, a very general attributive sense; it is, perhaps, nothing more than the determinative attached to the noun, which will be mentioned further on. The suffix *y* is equally general in meaning, signifying 'be-

longing in the category of.' Is *n* the noun-determinative? and are *w* and *y* to be connected with the case-endings *u* and *i*? From the simple noun-forms in which the *t* occurs as prefix it would appear to signify first the action (as in the abstract noun of action or Infinitive in Arabic), and then the result of the action, and sometimes, perhaps, simple attribution, as in *tirosh*, 'new wine,' literally 'shining,' from a stem meaning 'to be bright.' Possibly *t* is found as suffix, distinct from the feminine-ending, in Ethiopic, in the ending *ot*; but if so, it has a general attributive sense. The *s* is found only as prefix, and then apparently as connected with the derived stem known as Shaphel. Are these formative letters to be referred to original nouns or pronouns? Those who regard the sentence as the primitive unit of speech would explain them as originally meaningless elements of the polysyllabic unit to which significations were in process of time attached; but even in that case it is necessary to determine the oldest assignable signification of the suffix, no matter what its origin may have been. The question as to the nature and origin of these formative letters will be answered differently by different persons according to their conception of the nature and origin of the pronoun, and will not be settled till this second question is determined.

Next come the noun-inflections proper, the feminine, the cases, the determinative syllables and the plural. It is a question whether these are to be considered as identical with or different from the formatives above-mentioned. It would be in accordance with analogy, and would greatly simplify the treatment to regard all developments of the stem as derivatives. But this is a different thing from regarding the similar formative additions as identical in signification and origin, and the proof of this it is difficult to furnish. There are two feminine endings, *t* and *i*, which resemble in form the suffixes and prefixes above-mentioned, but it is not easy to see any resemblance in the meaning. It would be necessary to assume a very general attributive meaning for the ending, and suppose that this had in some way unknown to us been assigned to the expression of the feminine. This is certainly possible, and it cannot be said to be improbable. On the other hand, two endings originally very different in form and meaning, may in time have come to assume the same form. It would be a pleasing generalization to bring all the formative uses of the letter *t* under one original, but it would be arbitrary and precarious. The immediate question as to the feminine ending is whether it had originally a

nominal or a pronominal signification, to which no satisfying answer has yet been given. For the feminine *i* it must first be determined whether this or *ya* was its earlier form, and the conclusion on this point will probably go along with that reached in relation to the case endings. If we may judge from the present form of the noun, the feminine was the earliest modification of the uninflected stem, after which came the designations of case, now existing under the forms *u*, *i*, *a* for the singular, *û*, *î* for the plural, and *â*, *ai* for the dual. The explanations of these forms at present proposed fall into the two classes mentioned above: those that regard them as originally meaningless and gradually invested with a numerical signification, and those that look on them as from the first significant agglutinations, either nominal or pronominal. For the purposes of etymological investigation, however, the difference between these two is not important, since in either case the object is to determine the earliest assignable form and meaning of the termination, and these are independent of the theory of origin. All who have written on the subject agree that the endings in the three numbers are composed of the same elements, and it is only necessary as the first step towards the solution of the problem of origin to determine what original form will satisfy all the conditions of the terminations as they now exist. Was the form *u*, *i*, *a*, or *wa*, *ya*, *ha*, or something different from both these schemes? According to the first the plurals and duals are made from the singulars by an extension of the vowels, sometimes by a simple vowel-broadening (*u* into *û*, etc.), sometimes by the insertion of *i* or *y* (as in the dual). This insertion is somewhat arbitrarily assumed, and the second scheme seeks to meet this difficulty by supposing a symmetrical agglutination of the three syllables, *wa*, *ya*, *ha*, which under certain phonetic conditions are retained, under others become *u*, *i*, *a*, or, by doubling, *û*, *î*, *â*. They are thus brought into connection with the formative endings *w* and *y*, as in nouns ending in the singular in *ât* (or *ôt*), *ît* and *ût*, which are regarded as being for *ha. ha. t*, *ya. ya. t* and *wa. wa. t*—a somewhat cumbrous set of forms. Both these schemes furnish more or less satisfactory explanations of a part of the facts, and neither explains all. For the meanings of the endings, *u* or *wa* and the others, nothing beyond a general demonstrative sense, 'this' or 'that,' has been suggested. The internal plurals, which are confined to southern dialects, are properly derived nouns, but the derivation is effected by peculiar means, and constitutes a charac-

teristic of these dialects. The same principle is carried out to some extent in the formation of derived verb-stems, but far more elaborately in the noun. The singular and plural forms sometimes change places, and it seems most probable that the internal or broken plurals are only nouns used as collectives and therefore naturally as plurals. The external plural of the feminine in *at* resembles these in so far as it is made by broadening the vowel *before* the feminine sign *t*, after which come the case endings of the singular. It is doubtful, however, whether this fact favors the view that the ordinary plural case-endings are formed by broadening the vowels of those of the singular. It is merely a grouping of a number of objects of the feminine gender into a single mass and regarding them as a unit, as happens, for example, in the Greek use of a singular verb with a neuter plural subject. The ending *ât* is, however, sometimes explained as coming from *a(t)*, *at*. After the case-ending the Semitic noun takes a determinative letter or syllable, which indicates sometimes a definite, sometimes an indefinite state. The form is commonly *m* or *ma* (mimation), or *n* or *na* (nunation), but in one dialect, the Sabeian, *han* also occurs; this last would most naturally be regarded as a compound of *ha* and *na*, the second element being the nunation, and the first connecting itself with the Aramaic *a*, the sign of the emphatic state (which is by some, however, regarded as the accusative ending). On phonological grounds the *m* is generally regarded as older than the *n*, but this is uncertain. The fact that the same dialect (as the Assyrian) uses *m* in the singular and *n* in the plural shows that the two existed side by side. This proves nothing as to chronological priority, but may indicate that both the endings were found in the primitive Semitic language. These determinatives have sometimes been brought into connection with the adjective or formative endings *m* and *n*, but without any satisfactory result. As to their origin the classes of opinions are the same as in similar forms above-mentioned: they are regarded as differentiations of meaningless endings, or as significant appendages, nominal or demonstrative.

This last difference of opinion recurs in the discussion of the pronouns themselves, which are held by some to have originally had the pronominal sense, by others to have been nouns on which a demonstrative sense was grafted. This question is not likely to be soon settled. In the case of one word, the Hebrew relative pronoun *asher*, a nominal origin has been made probable; but for the simple forms common to all the Semitic languages, whose origin

goes back to a remoter antiquity, it is not likely that any such derivations could be discovered, if they had taken place. In this discussion, however, no weight can be attached to *a priori* assertions, as, for example, that the nature of the pronoun is so different from that of the noun that it could not have had a nominal origin. The form of the stems or roots is plain, except in the case of the personal pronouns. In these it is commonly supposed that the syllable *an* enters as a component (in the third person in Jewish Aramaic), leaving easily recognizable stems except in the first person, of which the original may have been in the singular *an-a-ki* (or *an-a-ku*), and in the plural *an-aḥ-na* (modern Egyptian Arabic *aḥ-na*, modern Syriac *aḥ-nan*, *aḥ-ni*); here the stem left, after omitting the *an*, seems to be *ak* or *ka* or *ki*, or the variants *aḥ* or *ḥa*. Another form, *ti*, occurs as personal affix of the verb in the Perfect singular, and the same co-existence of *t*- and *k*- forms is found in the second person. This has been explained as an interchange of *k* and *t* or (what amounts to nearly the same thing) an assimilation of one to the other, or as the co-existence of two independent stems, or a compound stem combining the two is assumed, of which one part or the other is supposed to be selected by the different dialects, or in the same dialect to be assigned to different uses. The simplest supposition is that of interchange, though it is not without difficulties. There is yet another form of the first person which occurs as suffix in Assyrian, Arabic and Ethiopic, namely, *ya*, of which no explanation has been offered, except a suggestion that it may be a phonetic extension of the *i* found in *anoki*. In the third person we have for the masculine and feminine of the singular respectively *su*, *si* (Assyrian) or *hu*, *hi* (Hebrew) or *tu*, *ti* (Ethiopic); Arabic shows the longer forms *hu-wa*, *hi-ya*, and Ethiopic *we-e-tu*, *ye-e-ti*. The *s*- form is commonly regarded as the original. The *wa* and *ya* are brought into connection with the supposed case-endings above-mentioned, whereby, however, the vowels of *hu* and *hi* remain unexplained; for if they be regarded as identical with the case-endings of the noun, which arise from *wa* and *ya*, then the presence of these syllables in *hu-wa* and *hi-ya* seems superfluous. Whether the *u* and *i* originally marked a difference of gender is doubtful; the vowel-difference is not always found in the plural, the objective feminine sometimes has the form *hā*, and in early Hebrew *hu* is used for both genders. The plural in the second and third persons is now marked by the addition of *m* or *n*; usually the former is employed for the masculine and the

latter for the feminine, but in Assyrian *n* occurs in both genders, the distinction being made by the vowel (*u* for the masculine, *i* for the feminine, as in the singular): the dual (in Arabic) has *m* in both genders. These endings are usually compared with the mimation and nunation in nouns; and it is to be noted that Arabic, which employs only the *n* in nouns, has *m* in the plural and dual masculine of the pronoun, while Assyrian, which has *m* in the singular of the noun, shows only *n* in the pronoun—whence it may be inferred, as suggested above, that both letters existed as determinatives in the primitive language. It has been attempted to find distinctions of case in the personal pronouns, for example, in the different forms used as suffixes to verbs and to nouns in the first and second persons, the former being supposed to represent the subject and the latter the object; but it seems clear that they are merely different fragments of the pronominal stem expressing the same relation of the person to the nominal or verbal stem; there is no case-difference between *malak-ta* and *malke-ka*, the pronouns in both mean “in respect to thee,” and usage alone has fixed the present difference in the sense. The striking similarity between the Semitic personal pronouns and the Egyptian is by some regarded as an accidental coincidence, by others as the result of borrowing by one language from the other, and by others as the indication of the original unity of the two; it is a point that needs further investigation.

In the verb the first question relates to the form and tone of the simple stem, and the origin of the derived stems. It is generally agreed that the original simple stem was trivocalic; not much attention has been paid to the tone; the facts of later tone-usage in the various dialects seem to favor the view that the accent was originally on the first syllable. It may be assumed of the derived stems, as of the simple, that they are nouns, and formed according to the laws of noun-derivation, without deciding whether their origination was prior or posterior to the full elaboration of the verbal conception. Their ultimate elements are few and simple, though the combinations in the various dialects are numerous and complicated, and their origin difficult of explanation. They may be reduced to two classes: 1. Those made by modifications of the existing material, as by doubling a radical or a syllable of the simple stem, by broadening a vowel, or by inserting a weak consonant, as *w*, *y*, *n*; 2. Those made by the addition of new material, as by prefixing or inserting *sa*, *ha* (*a*), *ta* or *na*. The first class expresses

an intensifying or directing, or some similar modification of the meaning of the simple stem, the second adds a substantive idea, usually causative or reflexive; there is apparently a symbolism in the modes of formation. The same questions here arise, and the same sorts of explanation are given as have already been mentioned in the case of the noun. Are the prefixes and infixes nominal or pronominal? That the original significations were very general may perhaps be inferred from the fact that they sometimes interchange: the reduplicated form, usually intensive, is sometimes causal, and the *ta* is sometimes reflexive and sometimes causal. Or, this may result from a coalescence of originally distinct forms. What has determined the prefixing or insertion of these formative syllables? and can they be brought into connection with those of the noun? A more general question is that of the reasons for the choice of their particular form of verb-development (which is found in other languages also); but this goes outside of the domain of etymology. Of the two verb-forms, the Perfect and the Imperfect, the former is generally held to be a concrete noun with personal pronouns attached, except in the third person, which is a bare noun, the plural being formed regularly. The Imperfect also is a concrete noun, made from the simple stem by the prefix *ya* (mentioned above), the three cases in *u*, *i* and *a*, the last also with *n* added, being made the bases of separate forms which have been differentiated into various syntactical uses. It is noteworthy that all the dialects, whether they employ *m* or *n* as the determinative of the noun, have *n* in this form of the verb; similar phenomena have been referred to above. The chief difficulty in the Imperfect is found in the prefixes, especially those of the second and first persons. Are they pronouns, or are they forms that preceded the differentiation of the pronoun? If the other persons are formed on the third, what has become of the *y*? and if not, what is the nature of the prefixes? if they are pronouns, why are they prefixed? and if they are not pronouns, whence come the personal significations? These are some of the questions that have to be answered.

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